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AUTHOR	Quigley, B. Allan
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ABSTRACT

Two studies examined why many adults choose not to attend adult basic education (ABE) classes and ways of improving retention in ABE. In the first study, 17 adults from the Pittsburgh area who had recently quit attending ABE classes (termed "reluctant learners") and 20 adults who had persisted in ABE were interviewed. It was recommended that teachers and counselors make ABE programs more attractive to reluctant learners in the following ways: asking about students' past and previous school experience, providing individual or small group instruction for identified reluctant learners, making the ABE curriculum academically challenging, and offering tutoring and computer-assisted instruction. In the second study, 20 predominantly African-American adults who had dropped out of school an average of 17 years earlier were interviewed to identi the personal and situational barriers and other factors preventing their participation in ABE. The following actions were recommended to encourage nonparticipants to attend ABE: base course design and marketing on needs assessments from potential learners and incorporate an "unlearning" component to overcome previous negative associations with schooling, include cultural awareness in teacher training, use local instructors, and test alternate programs through demonstration projects. (MN)

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ED 378 408

Improving Retention in Adult Basic Education and Recommended Strategies for Effective Instructional and Counseling Interventions

Reasons for Resistance to Attending Adult Basic Literacy

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Ohio Literacy Resource Center

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Enhancing adult literacy in the State of Ohio

Research in Adult Literacy

Improving Retention in Adult Basic Education and Recommended Strategies for Effective Instructional and Counseling Interventions

Author: B. Allan Quigley

Source: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University

Purpose: The objective of this study was to generate specific recommendations for more effective counseling and teaching intervention strategies, based on the acquisition of new knowledge concerning motivational constructs among resistant Adult Basic Education (ABE) student dropouts. This would assist ABE programs in dealing with student resistance.

Participants: A sample of 17 adults from the Pittsburgh area who had recently quit attending ABE classes was selected by the counseling and teaching staff. Those selected were reluctant learners who had reasons for quitting other than stated, observed, critical, situational, or institutional barriers. They were aloof and skeptical, exhibiting a resistant attitude; however they had been attending voluntarily. A group of 20 adults who had persisted in an ABE program made up the control group.

Method: Two trained, culturally-appropriate interviewers were hired: a black male and a white female, both familiar with the program. A voluntary panel of experts from Pittsburgh's Bidwell Training Center and Connelley Skills Center designed questions for open-ended, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews.

Results: Both the control group (persistent learners) and the resistant group (reluctant learners) felt that ABE was something they wanted to do. Reluctant Learners (RLs) had expected ABE to be more like their earlier school experience but found that it was not. RLs felt "comfortable" or "very comfortable" upon entry in the program and found ABE coursework to be generally easy. RLs' complaints centered around perceived lack of attention from ABE teachers, as well as a lack of academic challenge. Persistent learners (PLs) were popular and had many friends, much the same as when they had attended school earlier. RLs tended to have few friends, repeating the pattern of their previous schooling as well. The most significant influence on staying in the program was the ABE atmosphere, followed by teachers and counselors.

Conclusions: Reluctant learners were more goal oriented and wanted a more intense and challenging academic program than they got. Significantly, none of the RLs felt close enough to the teachers to raise a problem or complain. Reluctant learners in this study were consistently younger than the persistent learners.

Implications:

- A carefully planned intake process that gives more attention to those who need it should be considered. The person of first contact should ask about the student's past and previous schooling experience.
- Teachers must be aware that students with negative past experiences in school will need more attention. Individual or small group instruction may be necessary alternatives for the potential dropout.
- The ABE curriculum needs to be academically challenging.
- Those who are attending--but appear reluctant--should be offered educational alternatives such as tutoring or computer-assisted instruction.
- Further research is needed to see if RLs who drop out would actually return. "The field needs to understand its own willing, potentially committed participants better. Reluctant learners, like resisters, seriously want an education. Further research on how to best fulfill their ambitions will serve policymakers' ambitions in the long run if we have the will and support to continue learning from our own learners." (See Study Three, p. 17.)

Condensed by: Karen Sturm.

This study is included in the document titled Understanding and Overcoming Resistance to Adult Literacy Education. A copy may be obtained from the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University, College of Education, 204 Calder Way, Suite 209, University Park, PA 16801. Telephone number, 814-863-3777; FAX (814) 863-6108. The price is $35.00 and includes shipping and handling.

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KENT STATE UNIVERSITY, 414 WHITE HALL,
PO BOX 5190, KENT, OH 44242-0001
800-765-2897 OR 216-672-2007
EMAIL ADDRESS: OLRC@KENTVM.KENT.EDU

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Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Enhancing adult literacy in the State of Ohio

Research in Adult Literacy

REASONS FOR RESISTANCE TO ATTENDING ADULT BASIC LITERACY

Author: B. Allan Quigley

Source: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to determine why adults do not attend Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs; to investigate alternative delivery systems, instructional models, and program materials; and to investigate marketing strategies that could be more effective for recruiting nonparticipants.

Participants: Twenty adults in the Pittsburgh area, predominantly African-American, were interviewed, 8 male and 12 female. Total number of years in school averaged 10.72, and the highest grade levels achieved ranged from grade 7 to grade 11. Participants had been out of school an average of 17 years. Participants refused to attend ABE sessions, although they knew about programs and their own eligibility.

Method: Two professional African-American interviewers, one male and one female, conducted two-part interviews. The first part was designed to collect basic demographic data, and the second to provide information related to resistance. Resulting data were examined for consistent response patterns, which were analyzed and cross-referenced to discover themes.

Results: Those interviewed said they quit school because of insensitive teachers, pressure from peer groups, irrelevant subject matter, boredom, racism, and problems with school rules. Most valued life-relevant learning, including reading and math. None wanted "schooling."

The three major reasons for resisting ABE classes were: 1) personal/emotive; 2) cultural/ideological; and 3) age related, those who felt themselves "too old to learn." All felt that ABE was irrelevant for them. Most saw education in the abstract as having great social/economic value for their children and for others, but believed that personally, education had failed them.

Participants felt that ABE classes could be improved with smaller classrooms and sensitive, considerate, culturally-aware teachers who respected learners as adults. Moreover, they indicated an interest in attending such classes. Finally, they recommended television, mailings, and advertising through churches and housing projects as preferred means of marketing ABE programs.

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Conclusions: In addition to personal and situational barriers, such as child care, transportation, and scheduling, there are deeper reasons why nonparticipants avoid ABE programs. Previous experiences in school combined with skepticism that ABE would be anything other than another type of school plays a major part. Resisters were of three types: 1) those who felt embittered and reluctant to return; 2) those who felt that school had been irrelevant and insulting; 3) those who felt too old to return to school, students who were 50+ years of age.

Implications:

- ABE course design and marketing should be based on needs assessment from the potential learners.
- Teacher training should include attention to cultural matters, and awareness of the experiences of ABE learners should be part of teacher training.
- The use of local instructors would be desirable.
- Various marketing approaches should be used to attract students.
- Course design and marketing should include an "unlearning" component to overcome previous negative associations with schooling.
- Further research on the links between previous schooling and resistance is needed.
- Demonstration projects are needed to test alternate programs.

Condensed by: Karen Sturm

This study is included in the document titled, Understanding and Overcoming Resistance to Adult Literacy Education. A copy may be obtained from the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Pennsylvania State University, College of Education, 204 Calder Way, Suite 209, University Park, PA 16801. Telephone number, 814-863-3777, or FAX 814-863-6108. The price is $35.00 and includes shipping and handling.

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